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ABSTRACT

The emerging field of literacy education for speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) is examined. First, four general goals of ESL literacy education are outlined: practical reading/writing skills; reading skills for building further learning; second language training when needed; and orientation to print as a source of meaning. Four kinds of ESL literacy learners are distinguished: pre-literate; non-literate or illiterate; semi-literate; and non-roman alphabetic. Seven functions served by literacy are noted, reflecting the culture of the United States and the uses to which literacy is put by a less educated, non-scholarly segment of society, and useful for organizing appropriate instruction. These functions include: instrumental; social-interactional; news-related; memory-supportive; substitute for oral messages; provision of a permanent record; and confirmation of attitudes or ideas. The relationship between orality and literacy is then discussed, and progress toward a theoretical foundation for ESL literacy education is reviewed. It is concluded that while the problem of illiteracy appears to be increasing and programs to remedy that situation are still inadequate, circumstances and current efforts hold promise. Appended materials include immigration and world literacy statistics, a proposed progression of literacy skills, references and selected bibliography, and a brief list of relevant commercial instructional materials. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (MSE)

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THE NEW ILLITERACY:

A Study of the Pedagogic Principles of Teaching English as a Second Language to Non-Literate Adults

We acknowledge that being an adult learner is difficult, that being an adult second language learner is even more difficult, and that being a pre-literate adult second language learner must be nothing short of a painful situation.

----Donna McGee, 1978.

Pre-Literacy Definitions

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

GENERAL GOALS OF E.S.L. LITERACY 8

CATEGORIES OF E.S.L. LITERACY LEARNERS 10

A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO E.S.L. LITERACY 14

ORALITY AND LITERACY- A NATURAL HIERARCHY? ..20

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE 24

CONCLUSION 29

APPENDIX I 31

Immigrants to the U.S.

APPENDIX II.....32

World Literacy Statistics

APPENDIX III.....33

A Progression of ESL Literacy Skills

WORKS CITED.....36

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED WORKS.....39

COMMERCIAL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS.....43

INTRODUCTION

The general framework of this research is to study the growing, but little understood, field of E.S.L. literacy in the United States of America today. The intent is to classify the various categories of learners, and to investigate the functions to which literacy is put and the general methods (and the theories behind them) currently in use to help them become literate and proficient in the English language. Because of the relative "newness" of the problem, little has been published in book form, but since 1980 there has been a steady flow of conference papers, articles in journals and magazines, and curriculum guides published by E.S.L. providers, from which the information presented here will be drawn and later disseminated to appropriate and interested agencies. The scope of this study is to investigate the pedagogic problem of dealing with E.S.L. literacy, but not to serve as a curriculum guide, although generalities of a curriculum will be discussed. In addition, it is not within the terms of this study to give more than a passing glance at the affective and environmental factors involved, while recognizing their relative importance. Before embarking on the principal topic at hand, it is first important to define, as an introduction, the general nature of the problem, and to answer some fundamental questions:- What is illiteracy? What is the function of literacy? Who is illiterate and why? What is the "new" illiteracy?

Illiteracy has become the scourge of the 1980's, as Americans have been made aware, through extensive media coverage and national campaigns, that approximately 27 million adults in the U.S.A. lack basic literacy skills(1984, U.S. Dept. of Education). At its simplest, literacy refers to reading and writing abilities - that

is, the skill of associating sounds with the written symbols that represent them, and then connecting those symbols to form words, sentences, and whole texts that are capable of maintaining their meaning over time and space. Reading and writing, the twin measures of literacy, together constitute the skill of manipulating written forms of language to engage in activities which are partly decided upon by the individual, but principally by the society in which s/he lives. Societies with high expectations of literacy will relegate non-literates to the fringes, while in groups or societies that attach little importance to literacy, illiterate persons will not be socially disadvantaged, although the groups as a whole may suffer deprivation. It is, therefore, not accidental that non-literate societies are largely found in the less developed corners of the globe and much less so in the "advanced" countries. (See Appendix II,p31) It is also evident that large numbers of non-literate adults who come from non-literate societies are, for the first time, experiencing the negative feedback and disadvantages that accompany illiteracy in America today.

What exactly is meant by "literacy", and why do Americans consider it to be the right and even the duty of each person in society to acquire? Literacy offers visions of freedom to make it possible for people to determine for themselves what they wish to know and to transcend the boundaries set by others; literacy gives one access to one's past and a continuity of identity (which may be vital to the psychological health of immigrant communities); literacy makes possible the pursuit of inquiry, rather than having to rely on being supplied with knowledge deemed by others to be suitable; literacy is communication, not just by television, radio,

and telephone, but by the exchange of ideas across time and space. (p92, Harman) Literacy,then, is a fundamental component of our culture, in which it plays a decisive role not only in the functional aspects of our lives, but also from a political, social, and personal standpoint. Professor Patricia A. Graham of Harvard University has described literacy thus: (p 92, Harman)

> Literacy enhances our humanity. If we are literate in late twentieth century America, we expand the ways in which we can learn, understand, and appreciate the world around us. Through literacy we enlarge the range of our vicarious experience, both through our command of written materials and through formulation of new ideas demanded by the rigors of writing and speaking....To learn, to express, to decide and to do....together permit us to become more autonomous individuals, less circumscribed by the conditions of social class, sex, and ethnicity into which we are born.

Most English speaking adults who are loosely termed illiterate in the U.S.A. today do,in fact, possess some reading skills, but not enough to cope with day-to-day living in an increasingly competetive and technological society. These adults fall under the term of "functional illiteracy", which in the past was used to describe an adult of 25 years or more who had less than a 5th grade schooling. In 1970, the National Reading Council survey conducted by Louis Harris used the term "functional illiterate" to indicate any person over the age of 16 who lacks the reading ability necessary for survival in the United States today. This very loose and nonspecific definition of functional illiteracy, which can vary widely from one society to another, and even

within individual groups of a particular society, was clarified by the Ford Foundation in 1979, which highlighted the role of the individual in determining his own literacy needs. (Hunter and Harman, pp7-8)

> Functional literacy is: "The possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious, or other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to read and write adequately to satisfy the requirements they set for themselves as being important for their own lives; the ability to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and the ability to solve the problems they face in their daily lives."

Western countries have long recognized the importance of literacy to the overall well-being of individuals and to the health of their national economies. However, world-wide it is estimated by U.N.E.S.C.O.(1970) that at least two out of every five adults are still unable to read and write, and that, although great efforts have been undertaken to improve literacy, the number of illiterates is growing as the population explodes in third-world countries. This situation has had a considerable impact on the United States, as immigration trends began to change markedly from a relatively well-educated flow of immigrants prior to 1975 to large numbers of refugees (approximately one million annually, legal and illegal) coming into America in the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's from countries in Asia and Central America (for example, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Mexico, and Guatemala), where literacy

rates are very low (See Appendix 2). Many cities in the U.S.A. today, particularly in Texas, Florida, New York, and California, are faced with a situation of having to integrate into the local population a growing new segment of society, which is likely to lack two major skills - a knowledge of the English language whether spoken or written, and the skill of literacy in any language, but specifically in English. A survey released by the U.S. Department of Education in 1986 showed that 37% of illiterate adults do not speak English at home, and that up to 86% of non-English speakers who are illiterate in English are also illiterate in their native languages. Moreover, the limited English speaking segment of the population is growing larger, due to increased immigration and the large number of children born to immigrant families who are increasingly having their first contacts with the English language only when they enter school, and may leave school still handicapped by a lack of proficiency in the English language.

The limited English-proficient population, immigrants and long-term residents alike, face an educational challenge which is quite distinct from the challenge that faces an English-speaker who lacks literacy skills. The heart of this difference is that for the limited English speaking person, literacy also includes, as a pre-requisite, the ability to listen to, comprehend, and speak the language. English speakers can often "get by" without reading and writing skills, since they can use spoken language and take advantage of the assistance of friends, co-workers and family members. However, the limited English speaker lacks this capacity to "get by", because s/he does not possess the ability to listen to, comprehend, and produce the spoken language necessary

to get information and assistance to circumvent literacy problems.

Many in the limited English speaking population have the even greater challenge of not being literate in their own native language, which can significantly affect their ability to acquire a new language. Large numbers of immigrants from Central America and Southeast Asia, many of them from unsophisticated rural areas, have had little or no previous education in their native countries, and, therefore, are faced with a double challenge in their new country - that of learning to speak English and of making the connection between printed matter and meaning for the first time and in a language which is unfamiliar to them. In addition, they face the cultural challenges inherent in living in a very different society, in which literacy is often a necessity for survival, for finding and keeping a job, for having access to health care and welfare programs, and for understanding the world around them. Without literacy and language skills, new immigrants are generally doomed to a life of poverty, bound into their own subculture for mutual support, having little interaction with America or its citizens, and experiencing the failure of an American dream that had propelled them here in the first place.

This "new" illiteracy, then, is a relatively recent phenomenon and it has not attracted the same kind of media attention that has been directed at illiteracy among native-born Americans. This is partly because of the nature of the problem itself; the adults in question are unable to either verbalize or put on paper the problems that beset them, and they tend to be so inadequately acculturized that they lack the societal ways and means by which their voices

may be heard. In addition, there is no scapegoat to blame here, no school system to take the rap for inadequate education, no bureaucracy to blame, no members of the public to be outraged. The situation is one that simply exists, and one that has largely gone unnoticed. Around the nation, however, non-literate E.S.L. students are enrolling in record numbers in English classes in an effort to improve their chances for employment and in order to cope in an English speaking environment. Long waiting lists for E.S.L. classes are recorded in all major resettlement areas, and even though programs have expanded tremendously in the last ten years, there are not nearly enough of them to meet the perceived need. E.S.L. programs include, sometimes in one multi-level class, all levels of English (from beginning to advanced level) in the areas of writing, listening, speaking, and reading, with English for non-literate adults being the most basic and most difficult to address, and the one which is the subject of this study.

GENERAL GOALS OF E.S.L. LITERACY

The field of teaching English as a second language to non-literate adults, commonly known as E.S.L. literacy, has several basic goals, and must attempt to accomplish the same basic tasks which are of fundamental importance to any adult literacy learner, regardless of whether English is a first or second language. Firstly, adults with little or no formal education must be provided with instruction in practical reading and writing skills that have immediate application to their lives. Secondly, a firm foundation in basic reading skills, attained through meaningful learning experiences which promote self-confidence, must be provided, upon which to build further learning.

In addition, E.S.L. literacy instruction must provide second language training to adults whose oral and aural skills may be extremely limited. All the skills of second language learning - listening, speaking, reading,and writing are interrelated and interdependent, and no single skill can be taught in isolation. Although there is some disagreement amongst experts about when reading and writing should be introduced, all the skills ultimately unite to form a total picture of language proficiency. Additionally, orientation to print may be a necessary preliminary task in the process of literacy, since non-literate E.S.L. students come from culturally diverse societies, in some of which literacy is uncommon and largely inaccessible. For these students, it is not an obvious concept that print can convey meaning. Bound intrinsically to the field of E.S.L. literacy is also the necessity of acculturization to a new society, one in which the demands, expectations, and

experiences of daily life may be unfamiliar, confusing, and paradoxical. Understanding the new environment, and being able to interact with it, are essential components of E.S.L. learning, and literacy training must also emphasize the value of present and past experience by the selection of materials relevant to the lives of the learners.

E.S.L. literacy, then, combines the goals that apply to all adult literacy learners with an additional set of goals which are particular to second language learners. In similarity with adult native language learners, each second language learner brings to the classroom or learning situation a unique set of prior experiences, future goals, educational backgrounds, language proficiency, age, length of residency in the U.S.A., and a multitude of personal circumstances that may enhance or detract from the learning process. Each student requires to be individually evaluated to ascertain what s/he already knows and what s/he needs or wishes to know, so that the learning process can be made as meaningful and as personal as possible to the individual. In this context, it is important to address several crucial issues: Who are the learners? What is to be taught? How should orality and literacy be sequenced? How does the field of E.F.L. literacy fit into a theoretical framework?

CATEGORIES OF E.S.L. LITERACY LEARNERS

Learners of English as a second language who have special difficulty learning to read and write English due to lack of literacy skills in their first language, may range from peasant refugees, who never had the opportunity to go to school, to working class immigrants, who may be familiar with some survival sight words, but lack skills in decoding new words. Some may even be reasonably literate in their native non-roman alphabetic language, but have not yet learned to transfer those skills to a new system of symbols. In addition to this wide range of literacy skills amongst learners, is an equally wide range of listening and speaking skills, ranging from an almost total lack of comprehension and speaking ability to considerable oral and aural fluency. However, the one factor that they all share is the necessity of learning to decode written English, whether it is for the purpose of survival in a new country, where the written word plays a dominant and pervasive role, or whether it is for job advancement and cultural integration. In order to avoid bunching together all E.S.L. literacy learners in a single all-embracing category, the terms pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate, and non-roman alphabetic are used to describe the considerable diversity found amongst them.

Pre-literate E.S.L. literacy learners come from cultures in which literacy is rare or non-existant, and they were, therefore, never exposed to the written word. Such learners may be members of the Hmong tribe from Laos or Haitian Creoles, whose languages were only recently written down, and whose newly-formed writing systems still remain largely unfamiliar to most members, particularly

the elderly, of those societies. These learners are unaccustomed to seeing anything in print in their native language, including newspapers, books and street signs. They have never been to school and may require help in holding a pen. They are termed pre-literate because they must begin literacy learning by first completing pre-reading tasks, such as visual discrimination, comparing, and sequencing, before they are ready to undertake the much more complex skills of literacy. Pre-literates tend to pose the greatest challenge to teachers, since they have no background experience to bring to the educational environment, upon which they can build new skills. Their rate of learning is generally slow-paced, and much repetition and reteaching is necessary to reinforce skills being learned.

Non-literate (or illiterate) E.S.L. literacy learners are those who are not able to read or write their own language, but who come from cultures where literacy is relatively common, such as Mexico and Indochina. Their illiteracy may stem from poverty, war, oppression, or other absence of opportunity in their native country. Some may have attended school for one or two years, while others may never have had any educational opportunities. Because many come from the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, they may already have experienced the stigma of illiteracy in their native countries, which is then compounded in the U.S.A. to induce affective factors which may prove barriers to learning. However, the fact that they have been accustomed to noticing the world of print, even though they could not interpret it, in the form of public signs, newspapers and books, means that most already possess the pre-reading skills necessary for the beginning stages of reading.

Semi-literate E.S.L. literacy learners may have had up to eight years of education in their native countries, again often with intermittent attendance and under difficult conditions, but are unable to read and write their first language beyond the elementary level. They lack sufficient basic literacy skills in English for day to day functioning, although some may have developed considerable oral and aural proficiency (though often replete with inaccuracies). In the case of older learners who have been in the U.S.A. for a long time, their first language literacy skillsmay have atrophied due to lack of use and may not be transferable, in great part, to the experience of literacy in English. E.S.L. semi-literates closely parallel native speaking functionally illiterate Americans, since they both have some reading skills, but not enough to function comfortably in society.

Non-roman alphabetic E.S.L. literacy learners possess literacy skills in a language not written with the roman alphabet, such as Arabic, Assyrian, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, Greek, Korean, Russian, or Laotian. They may be semi-literate or even literate in their native language, but their unfamiliarity with the roman alphabet compounds their problems in reading and writing English. Non-roman alphabetic students usually need special instruction in left-to-right directionality, letter and number formation, the relation of letters to lines on the paper, and sound-symbol correspondance. Being reasonably literate in their native language, however, gives them a head start in being able to transfer the abstract, cognitive skills necessary in reading and writing the English language.

These four categories of E.S.L. literacy learners show clearly

how diverse the field of E.S.L. literacy is, and how each individual must be assessed independently of others. Although in practical terms, they may all be placed in the same class to be taught by the same teacher at the same time, they clearly have different needs to be addressed and different strengths to contribute to the learning process.

A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO E.S.L. LITERACY

> "If functional literacy in the first language implies meeting the normal demands of society, then second language literacy implies the extent to which one's literacy skills permit one to meet the demands of one's personal world. The needs of the individual's world impose different demands. For many, their world will remain limited by their opportunities."
>
> --Donna McGee, 1978
>
> (Pre-literacy Definitions)

In the quotation above, Donna McGhee underscores the importance of content and function in the E.S.L. literacy class, if learning is going to be both successful and relevant, so that the transfer of reading and language skills to the world beyond the classroom is maximized. Although no apparent research has been conducted specifically on second-language learners, a study by Shirley Brice Heath(p123-134) recorded the literacy behaviours of one black working-class community over a five year period to find out who reads and writes, for what purposes, and in what circumstances. Although the study did not involve immigrant behaviour in particular, the study group shared a number of common characteristics (minority group, low socio-economic status, and low educational skills) that make the results applicable also to the kinds of behaviours that might be expected to occur in second language learners. The research found that seven types of uses of literacy could be described:

1. Instrumental. Literacy provided information about practical problems of daily life (price tags, checks,

bills, advertisements, street signs, traffic signs, house numbers).

2. Social-interactional. Literacy provided information pertinent to social relationships (greeting cards, cartoons, bumper stickers, posters, letters, newspaper features, recipes).
3. News-related. Literacy provided information about third parties or distant events (newspaper items, political flyers, messages from local city offices).
4. Memory-supportive. Literacy served as a memory aid (messages written on calendars, address and telephone books, innoculation records).
5. Substitute for oral messages. Literacy was used when direct oral communication was not possible or would prove embarrassing (notes for school, messages left at home).
6. Provision of permanent record. Literacy was used when legal records were necessary or required by other institutions (birth certificates, loan notes, tax forms).
7. Confirmation. Literacy provided support for attitudes or ideas already held, as settling disagreements or for one's own reassurance (brochures on cars, directions for putting items together, the Bible).

These seven areas of literacy use reflect the culture of the U.S.A. and the uses to which literacy is put by a less educated segment of society. It is significant, in this regard, that these types of literacy do not include the more scholarly uses found in educationally advantaged milieux - critical, aesthetic, organizational,

and recreational. (Staiger,p32) Second language learners with poor literacy skills, then, are likely to need literacy for the same types of activities, although the individual will determine precisely what is most applicable to his/her daily life. This functional use of literacy should be reflected in the language and reading material to which the student is exposed in the classroom, so that students are taught to read the language they need to read, in order to comprehend the written language they encounter in their everyday lives. The functional approach to language teaching identifies the communication functions that students will actually use -identifying oneself, requesting information, giving directions, apologizing etc: - and then using that skill in all four areas of language learning (listening, speaking, reading,and writing).

When using the functional approach,the teacher needs to examine the students' daily activities, and analyse the students' contact points with the community, in order to learn what types of language are demanded of them. The teacher can accomplish this him/herself by observing the community and noticing what signs are in the neighborhood, to what written information the students have access (grocery bills, public aid checks, advertisements), and what forms they are required to complete. The students themselves can also aid in this task by bringing in written materials that they need to read and by writing down examples of signs they observe in the community. Mrowicki and Furnborough have found that the teacher will probably find "essential" language in the following areas: numbers, money, time, personal information (name, address, telephone number), forms, signs (pedestrian, traffic, safety), and general information (grocery ads, shopping receipts, bills).

However, the teacher should be careful of making wide-sweeping assumptions of the needs of all second-language literacy learners. Particular ethnic groups or individuals may differ widely in respect to their perceived needs, as is illustrated by an investigation of needs reported by Gail Weinstein of the University of Pennsylvania (p480-482). She points out that many programs providing "survival English" for refugees are based on the assumption that the first task faced by all refugees is to fill out forms. However, investigation of actual behaviour revealed that this is not always the case. Hmong women, for example, rely on male family members to take care of paperwork, so filling out forms is not a language function that they will have to deal with. Observation and investigation of these women's daily lives, however, revealed that Hmong women are skilled at producing intricate professional-quality needlework, so to answer the needs in this area of Hmong women's lives, one language program in Philadelphia has been designed specifically to provide them with the additional skills they will need to sell their crafts. Lessons cover literacy activities ranging from writing names and prices for tagging the pieces to preparing public relations materials, while verbal activities focus on the skills necessary for interacting with salespeople and customers, thereby maximizing both self-reliance and interaction between the Hmong women and native speakers.

Another study by Pat Rigg, entitled Petra: Learning to Read at 45, offers a somewhat contradictory viewpoint, yet again emphasizes that the teacher must answer to the student's expectations, if learning is to be successful. Petra Rodriguez, a middle-aged Spanish speaking migrant woman without reading skills, made it clear,when

interviewed about reading, that she felt it to be the responsability of literate people to teach illiterate people how to read. However, it subsequently transpired, when the reading process ran into problems, that the woman's idea of reading differed from the tutor's, since her concern was more with accurately identifying letters and sounds than with having meaningful reading experiences. This situation may not be typical, but it illustrates the importance of taking into account the expectations and desires of students in applying teaching methods and materials.

In addition to the challenges of language and literacy, learners must meet the cultural challenges of understanding the expectations of Americans, the lack of which can cause problems, particularly at the work site. Expectations in the U.S.A. regarding punctuality, appropriate dress, hygiene, body language and the situational use of formal and informal language are often very different from those of other cultures. William Bliss (p15) reports that employers often praise the industriousness and motivation of their language minority employees, but they are often perplexed when these same workers fail to report sick, resist taking orders from women or younger people, or ask probing personal questions about the price of clothing, a car, a house, or one's salary. Common complaints against South-East Asian refugees, for example, were the occurrence of costly mistakes due to oral and written language problems, an unwillingness to confront sensitive personal issues, and an inability to communicate with other native speaking employees, resulting in accusations of stand-offishness and unfriendliness. These types of cultural confrontations can be avoided or reduced if the second-language learner is given a cultural insight into the behaviour of

Americans as well as into their language. Materials chosen should reflect and explain the cultural aspects of living in the U.S.A., many of which are not easily discernible or readily understood, unless they are explicitly pointed out. Becoming culturally aware can help to prevent negative stereo-typing of ethnic groups and may limit the prejudices of Americans towards them, which can be major impediments to their success in a community. John A. Neimi paints a bleak picture of the lack of integration skills amongst ethnic groups, which causes them to be locked out of mainstream America.

> "The perception of ethnicity among immigrant groups has resulted in their almost total linguistic and cultural isolation from members of the dominant society. The isolation may provide a degree of social and psychological security, but the price is high. Lack of integration skills results in job and social frustrations"

This pessimistic view of the immigrant experience is, however, largely confined to particular segments of first generation immigrants who cling to a familiar environment, because they have not had access or not made the effort to learn and accept the language and culture of America. It is, no doubt, a difficult adjustment, but one that can be made by most immigrants, given the motivation, the empathy, and the necessary help from educators and social workers to do so.

ORALITY AND LITERACY- A NATURAL HIERARCHY?

"In E.S.L. literacy, the learner should read and write only the language that he or she comprehends."

-Wayne Haverson, 1982

(Personal Communication, Bright, p2)

Once content has been defined, it is necessary to address the question of how to teach that content. Most experienced teachers of E.S.L. literacy believe that,with students who have very limited English proficiency, reading and writing should be delayed until some listening and speaking skills have been established. The rationale for this progression of skills is that English speakers have heard, then spoken ,English for five or six years before any systematic attempt is made to transfer their oral/aural skills to reading and writing. The natural progression, then, is to listen to the language, learn to speak it and then to become literate in it. Many students have not heard much English and initially lack the competence to hear and distinguish the sounds of the spoken language. This lack of familiarity with the sound system of English in turn limits the student's ability to begin speaking the language intelligibly. John and Mary Boyd (p5-6) suggest that, "emphasis must be shifted to <u>receptive</u> learning until the student becomes ready to <u>produce</u> language orally.....For second language learning too, has been shown to be a developmental process, a process in which the ability to speak follows an extended period of exposure to and internalization of the language through listening." Once some oral and aural skills have been developed, then those same skills can be practiced in reading and writing. Mary Finocchiaro (p70) asserted this most forcefully in 1964, at a time when languge

learning took little account of developmental skills:- "Listening and speaking should always precede reading. It is only after students can say material with reasonable fluency that they should be permitted to see it." To the non-literate E.S.L. learner, reading is not an aid, as it is to most literate learners. Since they are unable to associate the written symbol with the aural one, a word written on the blackboard is more likely to be seen as a threat unless the student has been given extensive oral and aural preparation for it.

Some researchers and teachers, however, believe that trying to teach literacy in an unfamiliar second language only leads to confusion. Nancy Modiano (p32-43) claims that "when we confuse the learning of a second language with the learning of reading, we only succeed in confusing the learner mightily, to the end that we retard the learning to read in either language and discourage academic achievement in any language." Indeed, there are some indications that teaching illiterate adults to read in their native language first is more likely to be successful, since "...the entire reading skill can then be transferred to the reading of English." (Finocchiaro, p136) This may well be sound practice in areas of the country such as California, Texas, and Florida, where there are large populations of Hispanics and where written Spanish is easily accessible. However, for most ethnic population groups, it is not a feasible proposition to find teachers who know Lao or Korean or Farsi, when that knowledge then has very limited application to materials available in the U.S.A.. Moreover, limited English speaking adults do not have time to spend becoming literate in their own language, when their immediate concern is to learn English and become functionally literate in it as quickly as possible.

A third, but relatively minor school of thought believes that literacy and orality should be introduced simultaneously. The main rationale for this is that the students come to class expecting to learn to read right away and will quickly lose interest, if they do not feel that their own desires are being met. Bearing in mind that the teacher's function is to facilitate students' learning, students who express a great desire to learn reading from the beginning may be accomodated by introducing pre-reading tasks, while still concentrating for the most part on aural/oral skills for the length of time necessary to develop them.

As further food for thought, Sarah Hudelson, in relation to research conducted on E.S.L. literacy with children, states that "Students learning English as a second language.... show teachers both that they are able to read and understand some material in English that they do not yet control orally and that they are able to read English when the material comes from within themselves, that is, when the approach used is an organic one that relies on what the students know rather than on what they do not know."(p228) Although Hudelson here advances theories on the order of acquisition skills that seem to largely contradict those involved in adult E.S.L. literacy, in which cognitive and affective factors play a decisive role, she nevertheless shares a common perspective on the invaluable role of the cultural environment on the language/literacy experience. Whether her research on children has any relevance to adults is questionable, yet the fact that both groups need to learn literacy and the English language more or less simultaneously puts them on common ground.

Learners of E.S.L. who already possess literacy skills in a non-roman alphabet generally are able to translate,with relative ease, those previously learned cognitive skills to a new set of symbols, once they have decoded them, so that fairly rapid advancement in literacy aquisition can be expected. Sarah Gudchinsky upholds the commonly held view that one only has to learn to read once:

> "How many times in a man's life does he learn to read? Just once. But what if he changes languages? Does he have to learn to read over again? The answer is no; he already knows how. Never let anyone talk you out of this basic principle. You learn to read only once."
>
> (Bright, p1)

Just as there is no single way to teach literacy and no single way to ensure successful language learning, a variety of teaching methods is generally employed with E.S.L. literacy learners, which may include Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, and Audio-Visual techniques combined with literacy skills that include sight word identification, survival vocabulary, and phonics. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss methods and materials at any length, a bibliography of related materials (p 39-42) and a suggested curriculum (p 33-35) are included in the Appendix for reference and further study.

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

> "Literacy is an activity, a way of thinking, not a set of skills. And it is a purposeful activity- people read, write, talk, and think about real ideas and information in order to ponder and extend what they know, to communicate with others, to present their points of view, and to understand and be understood."
>
> -Judith A. Langer
>
> (Language, Literacy and Culture, p4)

It has long been claimed by scholars (Goody, 1977; Olson, 1977: Ong, 1982) that literacy promotes higher orders of cognitive development that are significantly different than oral modes. While oral thinking has been described as emotional, contextualized, and ambiguous, literate thinking has been described as abstract, decontextualized, and logical. Literacy instruction, then, has been seen not only as a means of material advancement for both the individual and society, but as a means of transforming minds. Indeed, U.N.E.S.C.O. (1965) urged the acceleration of world-wide literacy programs to overcome the deep psychological differences between oral and literate thought. More recently, however, researchers (Tannen, 1982; Chafe, 1980; Scollon and Scollon,1981) argue that literacy does not replace orality, but instead interrelates with it, to the extent that people use both ways of thinking for differing purposes in specific settings.

The effects of schooling have also been thought to cause intellectual differences in literacy, although Scribner and Cole's

(1980) work with the Vai people in Liberia suggests that the intellectual differences are not dependent on schooling, but are much more a function of the ways in which particular literacy activities are used within a culture. Ong (1982) reiterates this finding by stating that cognitive growth "occurs as much from the outside as the inside. Much of it consists of the person's becoming linked with culturally transmitted amplifiers." (Langer, p109) Indeed,current research and thought focuses on the critical role that culture plays in how a learner gains access to the signs and symbols in the environment, and learns to invest them with meaning. As people learn the signs of a culture, which are embedded within both activities and language, they learn to use these signs in their thinking in interaction with others and then internalize them for personal use.

For second language learners, and in particular for those who also lack literacy skills, it is evident that language and literacy are interwoven with the context in which they live. Judith A. Langer (p8) points out that: "Literacy and culture development are inextricably bound,and learning a new literacy (i.e. becoming biliterate) therefore requires one to become, in a sense, bicultural." Accordingly, the methods and materials of literacy that are made available to E.S.L. learners resonate the cultural environment in which they learn it, and may well determine the eventual degree of success.

In 1981, Barbara Robson conducted a study at Ban Vinai Camp in Thailand to investigate the effects of both prior formal education and of previously acquired literacy in the Hmong language on the classroom performance of English among Hmong refugees. The outcome

of the study was to be used to determine whether or not a native language literacy component should be included in the program to aid in second language and literacy acquisition. The following three conclusions were drawn, which raise important questions about the effect of native language literacy on the acquisition of and performance in all skill areas in the second language classroom: (p12-13)

1. "Literacy, in any of the languages (Hmong, Lao, or Thai) produced a major effect on the subject's performance on the E.S.L. tests: The ability to read helped the subjects in their efforts to learn another language....An analysis of the actual performance of the non-literate subjects shows that they learned very, very little from the program, if anything at all.
2. The subjects who could read Hmong but who had never been to school did not score significantly lower on the tests than did those who had had formal education. Literacy in Hmong provided subjects with as much of a "leg up" in their efforts to learn English as formal classroom experience did. (p13)
3. .....among the subjects with formal education, those who could read scored significantly better overall than those who could not." (p14)

At first glance, this study seems to imply that non-literates are generally poor language learners, although it must be pointed out that this study involved only classroom performance and that both literate and non-literate Hmong have acquired Lao, the language of their host country, as a second language. However, Robson's findings do seem to suggest that there is, in fact, a correlation between native language literacy and second language acquisition.

Since comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), natural communication, and emphasis on message over form have been theorized as being the three vital ingredients in successful language acquisition, then Robson's findings seem to suggest that those who are literate in their native language get more access than non-literates to comprehensible input, and/or receive more opportunities for listener/speaker interaction in natural communication. Robson's research is the only one to date on the effect of native language literacy and second language acquisition, and it raises many unresolved questions for future investigation:- Is comprehensible input somehow blocked by native language illiteracy? Is access of comprehensible input denied them? In the light of previously discussed assertions that literacy leads to abstract, analytical thinking, it may be argued that the development of cognition is responsible for the language differences between literates and non-literates. On the other hand, cultural factors are held to play an equally, if not more, important role, access to which may vary greatly amongst second language learners.

If the theoretical approaches to language and literacy acquisition are in their infancy, the practical problems engendered by them are faced daily by teachers, who caution against expectations that are unrealistically high. Just as many native-speaking American adults in literacy programs do not complete them, or seem unable to progress beyond a certain level, the same is true of the E.S.L. literacy population. Some of the learners will advance to other programs or reach the limit they have set for themselves, while others appear to founder beneath an overwhelming complexity of educational, affective, environmental, and age-related factors.

The teacher's awareness of current research, methods and materials, familiarization with the students' backgrounds and needs, and provision of the students with meaningful cultural experiences are essential components of the teaching situation, but cannot be relied upon alone to provide easy solutions to the extremely complex fields of both language and literacy.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the number of limited English-speaking adults is growing, and that a significant number of them will lack literacy skills. According to the Population Reference Bureau, Hispanics and Asians comprised 7.9 percent of the total U.S. population in 1980. This will climb to 12.3 percent by the year 2000 and 18.1 percent by 2030. In addition, it is estimated that by the turn of the century, language minority workers will comprise more than 10 percent of the U.S. workforce, and approximately 25 percent of these workers are likely to require instruction to improve their English language skills. (Bliss p4) These language minority workers are going to be faced with an increasing level of communication, critical thinking, and literacy skills to keep pace with technological innovations and with a job market changing from manufacturing to communication-oriented service industries. If language minority adults are to be expected to fill a percentage of these jobs, then they must be provided with the language and literacy skills that they need to handle the requirements of the job.

Currently, there are not nearly enough programs to meet the needs of E.S.L. learners, resulting in waiting lists for instruction, which has to be extremely demoralising for those wishing to get on with their new lives, yet lacking the skills to do so. E.S.L. literacy learners. who are at the bottom of the learning ladder, are particularly hard hit, since few programs exist to specifically meet their needs. Typically, E.S.L. literacy learners are placed in beginning level or multi-level E.S.L. classes which are not

designed to accomodate the literacy needs of these students, since the reliance on printed text and grammatical explanations of language make them inaccessible to non-literate learners. Moreover, suitable materials and textbooks are only now beginning to be available to cater to this relatively "new" illiteracy, leaving over-extended E.S.L. teachers to bridge the gap. In the whole of New York City ther are only two or three special E.S.L. literacy classes reaching only the tip of the iceberg. Many other E.S.L. illiterates are floundering in regular E.S.L. classrooms or are not enrolled in any kind of program. Without adequate assistance, these people may be doomed to dependency on welfare, which in 1982 supported 52 percent of all refugees. (Swoap, 1982)

If the picture looks bleak, there are, however, some rays of hope. First is the resiliency of the refugees themselves, many of whose past lives have been subject to extreme mental and physical stresses. Despite the double handicap of lack of language and literacy skills, many immigrants do rise to the challenge and eventually find their way to reasonably productive and successful lives in the U.S.A. after an initial and necessary period of adjustment. Secondly, the problem of E.S.L. literacy is beginning to receive a lot more attention from adult educators and providers, who have been responsible for a steady stream of curriculum guides to meet the needs of particular populations, in the absence,heretofore, of commercially available textbooks and learning materials specifically for E.S.L.literacy. In addition, although research into the relationship between second language learning and literacy is only in its first stages, it can be expected to continue and eventually provide answers rather than hypotheses.

APPENDIX I

Fallows, James.
"America Helps Itself by
Helping Others."
U.S. News and World Report
Oct. 23, 1989: p47.

LEWIS HINE—THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Americans now. *Ellis Island*

IMMIGRANTS TO THE U.S.

1820-40 *750,949*
Ireland, Britain, Germany

1841-60 *4.31 mil.*
Ireland, Germany, Britain

1861-80 *5.13 mil.*
Germany, Scandinavia, China

1881-1900 *8.93 mil.*
Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia

1901-20 *14.53 mil.*
Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia,
Turkey, Japan, Mexico

1921-40 *4.64 mil.*
Italy, Germany, Poland, Canada

1941-60 *3.55 mil.*
Germany, Mexico

1961-80 *7.81 mil.*
Mexico, Cuba, Philippines,
Vietnam, Korea

1981-88 *4.71 mil.*
Korea, China, Vietnam,
Mexico, Central America

Note: Countries listed show primary nations of origin
USN&WR—Basic data: U.S. Immigration and [illegible]

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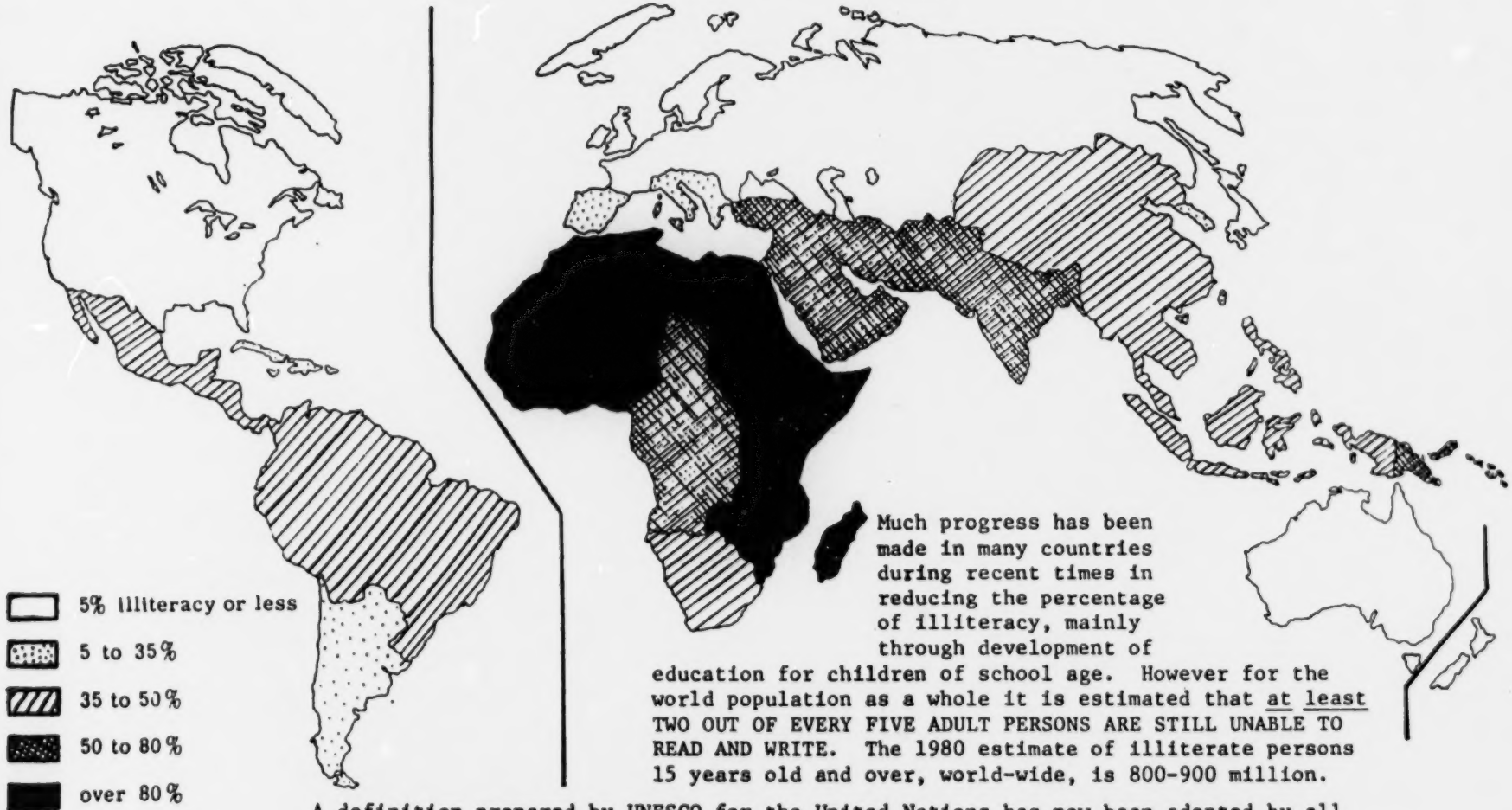
APPENDIX II

WORLD LITERACY STATISTICS



Much progress has been made in many countries during recent times in reducing the percentage of illiteracy, mainly through development of education for children of school age. However for the world population as a whole it is estimated that <u>at least</u> TWO OUT OF EVERY FIVE ADULT PERSONS ARE STILL UNABLE TO READ AND WRITE. The 1980 estimate of illiterate persons 15 years old and over, world-wide, is 800-900 million.

A definition prepared by UNESCO for the United Nations has now been adopted by all countries for national census purposes. It defines as literate a person "who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life." It is normally assumed that he may do this in any language he chooses, but in some countries people are not counted as literate if they are only able to read and write so-called "vernacular" languages which are spoken by minority groups of the population.

- from <u>Literacy 1967-69</u>, UNESCO, 1970

Laubach Literacy Action. <u>Laubach Trainer Handbook.</u>

Syracuse, N.Y.: New Readers Press, 1986.

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APPENDIX III

A PROGRESSION OF ESL LITERACY SKILLS

STAGE ONE: PRE-LITERACY

CONCEPTS

Same/different; letters/numbers by shapes; numeration; directionality - left to right, top to bottom; print is meaningful; filling out forms re; lines

CONTENT AREAS

Classroom language; personal information; numbers 1-30; emergencies; telephone, sight words; money - coins/bills; health/illness:parts of body.

ORAL SKILLS

Understand commands; understand personal information questions; give some directions; identify items; give personal information; count 1-30; describe where it hurts.

LITERACY SKILLS

Letter/number shape recognition; some sight word recognition;form letters and numbers(0-9); circle responses; write simple personal information; match sounds to letters; recognize initial letters.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Total physical response; tracing; copying letter, number, words; strip sentences for commands; matching; worksheets - completed as a group, then individually; number/letter dictation

A PROGRESSION OF ESL LITERACY SKILLS(cont.)

STAGE TWO: BEGINNING LITERACY

CONCEPTS

Alphabet; directionality; making change($); upper and lower case; grammar:-to be, question inversion; math concepts of addition and subtraction, carrying and borrowing.

CONTENT AREAS

Health; transportation; food; clothing; days of week, months; numbers 1-100; weather.

ORAL SKILLS

Auditory discrimination; understand:-"What is this?", "Show me the _____"; commands; describe illnesses; identify clothes and food; ask price, direction; pronunciation; match sounds to letters.

LITERACY SKILLS

Symbols:¢,$,lb; punctuation; letter discrimination; upper/lower case matching; sight word recognition; copying stories; give personal information; reading numbers aloud; initial sounds.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

TPR; strip sentences/stories; dialogues; sentence recognition; sight words/sentences; cloze; number/letter/sight dictation; copying dialogues

A PROGRESSION OF ESL LITERACY SKILLS(cont.)

STAGE THREE: INITIAL READING

CONCEPTS

Grammar:- simle present, ? with "do", 3rd person "s", plural with "s", WH questions; initial and final consonants; some phonics.

CONTENT AREAS

Health; housing; banking; bills; receipts/money orders; numbers 1-100.

ORAL SKILLS

Ask for assistance/information; give information; make an appointment; pronunciation; correct wrong change; state likes and dislikes.

LITERACY SKILLS

write money orders; read sentences and dialogues aloud; read student stories; locate totals on bills; introduce cursive; write short notes

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Strip stories; dialogues; sight word reading; Language Experience Approach stories; controlled writing from models; copying stories.

(Adapted from Bright, Jeffery P.)

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